**UbD/DI Reflections**

**Chapter One – UbD and DI: An Essential Partnership**

The first chapter of *Integrating* by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe discusses why Differential Instruction and Understanding by Design should be combined in the classroom. The book states that effective teachers focus on who, where, what, and how they teach. Looking at teaching this way gives us a reason to include both models into our profession. The authors state that Understanding by Design “speaks most fully about ‘what’ and ‘how’ (2)” and Differentiated Instruction “focuses on whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach (3).”

If there was one sentence that really stuck out to me in this chapter it was on page ten when the authors state, “Understanding by Design is a way of thinking, not a program (10).” This sentence stuck out to me because as I was reading one word kept popping into my mind, and that word was flexible. To me, in order to succeed as a teacher it sounds like it is absolutely important that I be as flexible as possible. As the book says, there are students who “need to move around to learn, students who need reading support…and so on (10).” If I am to be a teacher who follows Universal by Design and Differential Instruction practices then I better make sure I become flexible and good at thinking on the run.

**Chapter 2 – What Really Matters in Teaching (The Students)**

It is my personal opinion, and I am sure all teachers agree, that we teach for the kids. Any other reason and you have to wonder why be a teacher at all? So, it makes a lot of sense to me when Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe say in *Integrating* that, “students should always be in the forefront of our thinking as we make, implement, and reflect on our professional plans (13).” I want to be a teacher for others, not myself, so this chapter really strikes a chord with me. The underlying theme of Chapter Two is that school is about the students, and “[kids] come wanting to make sense of the world around them and their place in that world (16).”

Chapter Two also stresses the importance of teacher responsiveness. This means that it is key that a teacher be aware of all of the different needs and factors that affect his or her students and is practicing Differential Instruction. One tip that the book suggests to make the teacher more responsive to student’s needs is to, “allow students to express their learning in ways that best suit their strengths through varied products and performances (21).” This is something that I want to be central to my teaching style. I think student choice is crucial to learning and developing mature citizens. Being a “beach ball” type learner myself I know how nice it is when a teacher allows their students to express themselves how they wish, rather than only through one medium.

**Chapter 3 – What Rally Matters in Learning (Content)**

When building curriculum, teachers and administrators must consider essential questions that give clarity and direction to important content areas. Essential questions are basically big ideas that “provide a conceptual lens through which the specific content in the standards may be addressed (27).” To do this the book suggests planning backwards so that students may realize the desired essential questions. This seems to make sense to me and I understand why professionals are emphasizing this way to plan. Our class is now starting to get into backwards planning. At the moment it does not make too much sense to me but I know it will be the method I use to plan how my classroom is run.

I am glad that the book included a “Frequently Asked Questions” section into this chapter because I had the same question as the first one offered, and that was “How do we identify the big ideas that we want students to understand (32)?” How does one choose those “big idea” questions that are so important to a teachers’ plan? Relying on colleagues and considering state, national, and provincial standards are good platforms to start out with according to McTighe and Tomlinson. I know I will be having much more practice in Practicum and Student Teaching with developing essential questions, but at the moment it is somewhat of an overwhelming concept. If backwards planning is so important I certainly do not want to formulate an essential question that is not very good.

**Chapter 4 – What Really Matters in Planning for Student Success**

The main point behind Chapter Four is that curriculum is only half of what teachers actually teach. The other half, and arguably more important, is that teachers are there to educate human beings as well. The authors laid out a couple attitudes and skills that teachers who like to help students often do. Some are that they establish clarity about curricular essentials, develop flexible classroom teaching routines, and expand a repertoire of instructional strategies, among other things (40). Teachers that look out for the best for their students also make sure that their curricular essentials are clear. This clarity allows for more pinpoint differentiation and makes sure teachers avoid confusing situations.

The chapter continues to discuss different scenarios of teachers who care for their students and use differential instruction. Many of these scenarios are what I visualize teaching to be like. I want to be the teacher that no one has to question whether or not I care about my students. One example is Mr. Connelly, who uses all of his students’ best characteristics to make sure his classroom runs smoothly. He asks his kids during the first week of school what rules and routines they think works best. He also asks them to reflect on those rules and routines once established while also sharing his own perspective. This builds student interaction with the teacher as well as autonomy and a feeling of maturity.

**Chapter 5 – Considering Evidence of Learning in Diverse Classrooms**

Chapter 5 concerns student assessment and how teachers should structure their classroom around how they are going to assess their students. Jay McTighe and Carol Ann Tomlinson use the analogy of a photo album in regards to how teachers should use assessments. One picture, or one big test, is not an accurate portrayal of a person. But, many individual pictures placed together create a representation of someone’s life overtime. I think this is a great analogy for how assessment should be conducted. In high school I liked how we had multiple tests, quizzes, and projects because it took the pressure off of the assignments because they were worth less in the long run. Here in college everything is the opposite. Most of my classes in college so far have been reliant on so few assignments that each one is do or die. I would like to structure my classroom like a “photo album.”

The rest of the chapter continues to discuss how assessment should be considered and when assessment should take place. One point that the book stressed that I agree with is that assessment should not always be taken at the end of a unit. Rather, pre-assessment and ongoing examinations should be used to keep the teacher in touch with the needs of his or her students. Another concept I really liked and will certainly be using in my classroom is the tic-tac-toe format of assessment. This is when a teacher had specific assessments in mind but then lets the student pick which one they want to do themselves. A tic-tac-toe board has three columns with nine choices. In this case each column is a different type of assessment (Written, Visual, Oral) and the student must choose one of each. I love this idea and I think my students will appreciate the choice of assessment.